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ABSTRACT

Ancient languages are the deepest root of the humanities, drawing life from that distant time when the study of history, philosophy, literature, and of language itself began. On the Internet, students can return to those times, re-enter that age of discovery, and gain the linguistic skills to help keep the many branches of the humanities rooted there strong and vital. The learning objectives of this lesson plan are: to gain an appreciation for Greek drama through the study of a play by Sophocles ("Antigone"); to explore the cultural and historical context of Greek drama and its role in Greek society; and to reconstruct the experience of seeing a Greek drama performed and share that experience in an imaginative report. The lesson plan also contains the subject areas covered in the lesson, time required to complete the lesson, the skills used in the lesson, the grade level (10-12), and lists of the standards developed by professional or government associations that are related to the lesson as well as activities to extend the lesson. (RS)

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Live From Antiquity!

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Lesson Plans

SEARCH EDSITEMENT

Introduction

Ancient languages are the deepest root of the humanities, drawing life from that distant time when the study of history, philosophy, literature, and of language itself began. On the Internet, students can return to those times, re-enter that age of discovery, and gain the linguistic skills to help keep the many branches of the humanities rooted there strong and vital.

Learning Objectives

To gain an appreciation for Greek drama through study of a play by Sophocles; to explore the cultural and historical context of Greek drama and its role in Greek society; to reconstruct the experience of seeing a Greek drama performed and share that experience in an imaginative report.

Lesson Plan

1 Begin by having students read and discuss **Antigone** by Sophocles. Focus discussion on the underlying themes of the drama, the interlocking conflicts between men and women, age and youth, society and the individual, human justice and divine law, the obligations we owe to the living and the dead. Have students debate Antigone's choice, whether it betrays a tragic pride and inflexibility or demonstrates an heroic dedication to virtue. Conclude this discussion by having students comment on the relevance of this ancient play to contemporary life. When in recent history have individuals been forced to choose between the law and human rights? (In this connection, students might look into 20th-century versions of the play by Jean Anouilh and Bertolt Brecht.) When in their own lives have they faced a choice like Antigone's, a choice between obedience to authority and remaining true to one's conscience?

2 Have students imagine themselves time-travelling reporters sent back to the time of Sophocles to report on the opening of his new play, Antigone. Working in small groups, they can use the "Historical Overview" and the online "Encyclopedia" at the **Perseus Project website**, as well as resources in the school and public library, to learn about aspects of Athenian life in the 5th century B.C. You might assign each group a specific topic in this research -- family life, politics, the arts, religion, etc. -- but have

Literature: World

Literature: Drama

History: World: Ancient

History: World: Human Rights

10-12

close reading
literary interpretation
historical research
critical and inferential thinking
creative writing
Internet skills

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; (more)
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. (more)
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. (more)
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for

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all groups explore the practices of the Athenian theater, as preparation for their report on "Antigone" in performance. (The Perseus Project "Encyclopedia" conveniently gathers information about Greek drama in a section on the "Theater.") Where were Greek tragedies staged? What did the stage look like? What kinds of props and scenery were used? When during the year were plays performed? When during the day? Who performed in them? What costumes did they wear? Who came to the plays? How did they behave? What were they looking for -- entertainment? knowledge? enlightenment? What kinds of issues were addressed in plays? What was the playwright's role in the performance? Follow-up this research with a class discussion in which students share their findings and begin to gain some imaginative command over the facts they have accumulated.

3 Students might write their imaginary firsthand reports of the "Antigone" premiere in the form of a drama review or a traveler's journal. Encourage them to visualize the occasion in detail and to dramatize the experience by reporting, for example, how they got to the theater, where they sat, what they saw on stage and in the crowd surrounding them, how the audience reacted to specific lines of the play, and what they talked about after it was over.

4 Conclude the lesson by having students perform scenes from "Antigone" using gestures, blocking, and acting style they "saw" at the play's premiere. Discuss as a class how the play is enriched by seeing it in performance and recognizing its connections to Greek culture and society as well as to the world today. To sharpen this summary discussion, have students debate what the play might have meant to the women of Athens. What did it say about their role in society? What can it say about the relationship between men and women in society today?

Extending the Lesson

Teachers of Latin and Greek will find the **Perseus Project website** a valuable resource for helping students develop reading comprehension. The site offers texts by Caesar and Cicero, Xenophon and Demosthenes, among many others, in a format that allows students to quickly access hyperlinked wordtools, or a parallel translation, for interpretation of a difficult passage. In this environment, reading a classical text becomes an interactive process that reinforces student effort and reduces the frustration that is often the most formidable obstacle to learning. Have students who use the website for reading assignments report to the class about their experience.

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different purposes. (more)
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiencees for a variety of purposes. (more)
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. (more)
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. (more)
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (more)

National Geography Standards

10. The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of earth's cultural mosaics (more)
17. How to apply geography to interpret the past (more)

National Council for the Social Studies

1. Culture (more)
2. Time, Continuity, and Change (more)
4. Individual Development and Identity (more)
5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions (more)
6. Power, Authority, and Governance (more)
10. Civic Ideals and Practices (more)

National Standards for Arts Education

Theatre

5. Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices (more)
6. Comparing and integrating art forms by analyzing traditional theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and new artforms (more)
7. Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions (more)

8. Understanding context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and the present (more)

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

1.2 Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics. (more)
2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied. (more)
2.2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied. (more)
3.1 Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. (more)
3.2 Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through foreign language and its cultures. (more)
4.2 Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. (more)

National Standards for Civics and Government

1. What are civic life, politics, and government? (more)

View your state's standards